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SUBJECT: RISE IN AFGHAN AND SOMALI MINORS TO SWEDEN, NORWAY
AND FINLAND

REF: A. HELSINKI 574

[B](#). OSLO 525

[C](#). STOCKHOLM 452

[1](#). (U) Summary: A sharp rise in unaccompanied minors from Afghanistan and Somalia has been reported in Sweden, Norway and Finland, according to UNHCR's regional office in Stockholm. UNHCR explains that the teens are smuggled through Europe in order to escape deteriorating security and economic situations in their home countries. The newly-arrived individuals have put a strain on existing host country asylum procedures. Legal experts at UNHCR and Amnesty International have raised concerns about how the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) processes minors and warned that young people are at risk for criminal activity, religious radicalization and trafficking. Separately, the UN announced in late August that it would send an official from UNHCR to monitor how the SMB handles cases, in part because of the SMB's decision to resume deportations of Iraqi asylum seekers. In both Sweden and Norway, applications from Iraqi asylum seekers are down considerably from previously years, although Finland has experienced a boomlet in Iraqi applications in the first half of 2009. The situation of unaccompanied minors entering EU countries will be discussed at a September 21 Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting in Brussels. End Summary.

A WAVE OF UNACCOMPANIED AFGHAN MINORS

[2](#). (U) An unprecedented number of unaccompanied Afghan minors, primarily male, are arriving in Sweden, Norway, and Finland, according to Liv Feijen, Head of Protection Unit, at the UNHCR's Regional Office for the Baltic and Nordic Countries in Stockholm. In a mid-August meeting with Poloff, Feijen reviewed the latest trends from migration authorities in all three countries showing that Sweden received 347 Afghan minors in 2008 and an additional 291 arrived in the first half of 2009. In Norway, the increase is even more dramatic -- 1,003 young Afghanis arrived between January and July of this year as compared to 579 processed over the entire last year. In Finland, 43 Afghan teens applied for asylum between January and June in contrast to a total of 63 in 2008.

[3](#). (U) Feijen attributed the increase to the deteriorating security and economic situation in Kabul. According to press reports and evidence collected by UNCHR, the teens are smuggled from Afghanistan over the border to Iran. Once in Iran, the boys are sent to Turkey and on to Greece where they jump onto trucks and travel further into Europe. In Sweden, most arrive in the southern city of Malmo after crossing the Oresund Bridge between Denmark and Sweden. The payment for the smugglers is often raised by the boys' home communities, said Feijen, with the intention that the boys will then send money back home once they land a job in Europe. The entire

journey may take up to one year. According Feijen, minors who live outside the social system remain vulnerable to criminal activity, possible religious radicalization and trafficking.

TRENDS FOR SOMALI AND IRAQI TEENS

¶4. (U) Underage Somali applications for asylum are also growing in Sweden and Norway. The SMB reports that Somalis now constitute the largest group seeking asylum in Sweden. Between January and June, there were 355 Somali minors who applied for asylum in Sweden in contrast to 345 who had applied during the entire previous year. In Norway, figures from the UNHCR show that 214 applications were made by minor Somalis in the first part of the year as compared to 117 in all of 2008. In Finland, where this trend is less pronounced, UNHCR reports that 124 applications from Somali teens have been lodged this year (Jan. - June) and that a total of 329 were recorded last year.

¶5. (U) While there has been a steady stream of unaccompanied minors from Iraq into Scandinavia, the number has decreased from previous years. In Sweden, the SMB says that overall Iraqi asylum applications are down 74% from last year. In 2008, 464 minors applied for asylum in Sweden as compared to just 58 who have applied in the first part of 2009. This decrease is a result of many factors, including the SMB's position that asylum seekers may be returned to Iraq because of the improving security situation there. In Norway, 364 Iraqi minors applied for asylum in 2008 while only 49 have applied so far this year. However, in Finland there is a boomlet of Iraqi asylum seekers, according to UNHCR -- 129

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minors applied for asylum between January and June this year as compared to 179 who applied in all of 2008 (ref A).

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

¶6. (U) On a national level, the increase in the arrival of unaccompanied minors has put a strain on existing host country asylum processing procedures, said Feijen. In Sweden, minors live in transit housing until a municipality agrees to take them in, but fewer than half of the 290 Swedish municipalities have agreed to take in minors, leaving them without permanent housing or schools and prompting authorities in Malmo to call for other Swedish communities to share the resettlement burden. Feijen noted that in Finland new facilities have been built to accommodate underage asylum seekers, requiring unexpected increases in budgetary allocations. She also reported that in Norway these increases have been exacerbated by political campaigning leading up to the September general election in which anti-immigrant rhetoric gained traction (ref B).

¶7. (U) At the EU level, asylum policy in the EU will come into focus this fall as the Stockholm Program is debated (ref C). Feijen directed Poloff to a June 2009 UNHCR report recognizing that "asylum applications from persons of the same nationalities, with the similar histories, have divergent outcomes from one Member State to another." According to the report, the best interests of unaccompanied minors should be given highest priority, especially regarding decisions to return them to their countries of origin. A September 15 seminar in Brussels sponsored by the Swedish EU Presidency and the humanitarian agency Save the Children addressed unaccompanied minors in EU countries and continued discussions on this topic will be held at the Justice and Home Affairs Council meeting on September 21.

¶8. (U) Finally, at the international level, the UN announced in late August that a UNCHR official would spend nine months

monitoring how the SMB processes asylum decisions. The UNHCR has been a stern critic of Swedish migration policies, specifically since deportations to Iraq were resumed in 2008.

In a September 11 meeting with an Embassy representative, Madelaine Seidlitz, legal expert at Amnesty International, further questioned the SMB's process for determining the age of minors. Since the majority arrive in Sweden without legal documents, the SMB must establish an age, which Seidlitz said is often approximated by x-raying hands or reviewing dental cards. Seidlitz suggested that the SMB would assign the oldest age possible so that the individual could be processed as an adult and returned home more easily.

COMMENT

19. (U) Swedish officials are treating this problem largely as it relates to humanitarian and trafficking concerns, but not so much as the intrinsic radicalization problem it is. But we expect this will change given increasing media coverage of Swedish-passport holding extremists both here and abroad,
END COMMENT.
BARZUN